

"Do You Think We Should Still Take Our Vacation?"

Anna's husband, Alex, was asking for advice on whether he and Anna should take their yearly RV trip, or if they should stay home where things would be more familiar for Anna in the early stages of Alzheimer's. Anna kept asking him when they would be leaving but Alex was hesitant because he knew she would just forget about the trip later, and he wasn't sure if being in unfamiliar places would upset her.

I asked Alex to think about and answer several questions before deciding. First, what would be the potential benefits versus the potential risks of taking the trip? When you are living with a person with dementia, there are always safety risks regardless of whether they are at home or elsewhere. I told him if he felt they would both derive pleasure from the trip, and he was able to provide the constant vigilance that would be required with Anna, then they should try a short trip to test the waters. I advised him about some extra precautions that would need to be taken:

- Carry a cell phone at all times.
- Carry a current picture of Anna.
- Have both of them wear a MedicAlert bracelet (Anna's noting she has Alzheimer's and Alex's saying that he is the caregiver of a person with Alzheimer's).
- Have the name and the cell phone number sewn into all items of Anna's clothing.
- The RV would need to have some added locks to prevent Anna from wandering out at night, as well as keeping the doors locked while Alex was driving. It would be tragic if Anna forgot the RV was in motion and suddenly decided to go outside while Alex's attention was on his driving.

Some benefits of going on the trip would be that Anna would have increased stimulation and socialization that she wouldn't necessarily receive at home, but Alex would need to be able to recognize when Anna was becoming over-stimulated and needed to take a break from the journey. I felt that Alex could be building some wonderful

Excerpt from "Love, Laughter, & Mayhem – Caregiver Survival Manual for Living with a Person with Dementia"

memories for himself and the rest of his family, and he would feel good in knowing that he had helped to enrich Anna's life at that moment. Yes, she would eventually forget all about the trip, but every single, positive thing he did with Anna would have a benefit for her at that time. People with dementia begin to live in the moment, and the more wonderful moments you can give them, the happier they, and everyone around them are. If Alex felt Anna truly wanted to go on the trip, and he felt he was up for it as well, then I thought he could still create some wonderful travel memories.

Secondly, I advised Alex he would need to be aware of the warning signs of an illness and be prepared to take Anna to an emergency room for evaluation should the need arise. Some tips relative to that concern were:

- Keeping Anna hydrated and well rested would be key to helping her enjoy the trip.
- He would need to discuss the trip in advance with Anna's physician and have plans in place in case she required medication refills or copies of her medical records.
- It would be important for both of them to have their pertinent medical information as well as emergency contact information along with them, and easily accessible on the trip.

Third, Alex's travel plans would need to be very flexible. If he was constantly pushing to make it from point A to point B, then Anna would pick up on that stress and react in a like manner. If Anna clearly enjoyed stopping in one place for a few days, it would be nice if he were able to adjust the travel schedule to accommodate her. As with any person with dementia, the less you try to hurry them along, the happier you will both be.

If traveling in the RV was something they both had enjoyed in the past, the chances were good that they would still be able to experience many pleasurable moments. In the meantime, a short, two or three day trip would help Alex decide if both he and Anna were up for a much longer trip.

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